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PROPOSED MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1998-2001

Programme 10. Environment

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10.1 The overall orientation of the programme, which is under the responsibility of UNEP, is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

10.2 The broad approach to be followed by UNEP will focus primarily on developing and promoting assessments, analysing and advising on policy options and assisting in the formulation of management strategies.

10.3 The mandate of the programme emanates from General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972, which established the Governing Council of UNEP, the Environment Secretariat and the Environment Fund. Responsibility for inter-agency coordination in the field of environment was assigned by the General Assembly in its resolution 32/197 of 20 December 1977 to the Administrative Committee on Coordination with specific reporting responsibilities to UNEP. Furthermore, chapter 38, paragraphs 21-23 and 31-34, of Agenda 21, adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992 and endorsed by the Assembly in its resolution 47/191 of 22 December 1992, extended and reinforced the mandate of UNEP.

10.4 It is expected that by the end of the period covered by the plan, the programme will have accomplished the following:

(a) Provided, through periodic assessments and scientific forecasts, effective support to intergovernmental decision-making and promoted the creation of international and regional consensus on the main environmental threats and responses;

(b) Enhanced environmentally sound management of resources through international and regional arrangements;

(c) Through policy options and advice, assisted Governments, multilateral organizations and others in incorporating the environmental dimension into the sustainable development process and in strengthening environmental protection;

(d) Increased public awareness and attained greater capacity for environmental management and effective national, regional and international responses to the threats of environmental degradation;

(e) Achieved more effective coordination of environmental matters within the United Nations system.

Subprogramme 10.1 Sustainable management and use of natural resources

10.5 The subprogramme, which is coordinated by the Executive Coordinator, Natural Resources, in the Programme Division, will focus on the following areas: freshwater, coastal and marine resources, biological resources and land resources.

10.6 An estimated one third of the world's population will suffer from chronic water shortage by the year 2025 owing to increasing demand for drinking water

caused by growing population, decreasing quality of water resulting from pollution and the rising needs of expanding industries and agriculture. The shortage will be felt in particular by people in arid areas and by rapidly growing coastal populations and megacities. The increasing water scarcity, combined with its deteriorating quality, will have far-reaching global impacts on human health, socio-economic development potential of affected countries, freshwater and marine resources, and biodiversity, and may cause international conflicts over water rights. Pollution of freshwater is escalating throughout the world, affecting in many places the quality of drinking water and the integrity of freshwater and coastal marine ecosystems. The freshwater hydrological cycles are inseparably linked with marine systems and the problems besetting river basins have a profound impact on the coastal and marine environment. Pollution from land-based sources is currently the most imminent problem affecting the aquatic biological resources and biodiversity.

10.7 The objectives in the area of freshwater, coastal and marine resources are to strengthen internationally coordinated action to alleviate common global problems assailing water resources, especially the Global Programme of Action to Protect the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities; expand areas covered by regional seas conventions and action plans to river basins draining into them; redesign action plans with focus on integrated management of river basins and coastal zones; connect existing action plans for the management of river basins, lakes and marine areas into organically linked management units; promote freshwater protection and amalgamation methodologies, including recycling, in order to enhance available water resources, in particular in arid areas; and ensure that integrated management of watersheds, lakes and marine areas is based on scientifically sound, realistic and policy-relevant assessments.

10.8 The accelerating loss of biological diversity is undermining sustainable development opportunities worldwide, eroding genes, species and ecosystems that constitute important resources and support systems for human well-being. The challenge is to identify the real socio-economic causes and impacts of changes in biodiversity and to develop strategic means to use the components of biological diversity in ways that do not lead to their long-term decline, while contributing to increasing production functions that underpin human progress.

10.9 The objectives in the area of biological resources are to promote and support the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and provide institutional servicing to the Convention and other biodiversity-related conventions; develop policy instruments for integrated management of biological resources, including aspects of biosafety in accordance with the Convention on Biological Diversity; promote and support regional and subregional programmes for the protection of biological resources, including transboundary ecosystems; strengthen the capacity of Governments to formulate national environmental legislation and to prepare projects for submission to GEF for financing biodiversity country studies and action plans; and promote the formulation and implementation of strategies for the protection and sustainable use of marine and freshwater ecosystems and their living resources.

10.10 Dryland degradation is an urgent environmental problem, global in scope, placing some 1 billion people in 110 countries at risk, mainly in developing regions. An estimated one third of the Earth's surface comprises drylands, of

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which three quarters have suffered some land degradation. Land degradation also occurs in the more humid climatic zones. The causes of land degradation are complex: they include the impacts of drought and flooding; unsustainable agricultural, forestry and urban expansion policies; population and poverty pressures; unfavourable land-tenure rights; underevaluation of land resources and pricing failures; and numerous other social and economic processes.

10.11 The objectives in the area of land resources are to improve policy-relevant assessment of drylands degradation; strengthen international policy support to the development of national, subregional and regional action programmes; increase global awareness of dryland and desertification issues; support the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa; and assist in preparation of projects for submission for GEF financing in land degradation related to the GEF focal areas.

Subprogramme 10.2 Sustainable production and consumption

10.12 The subprogramme, which is coordinated by the Executive Coordinator, Sustainable Production and Consumption, in the Programme Division, will focus on the following areas: cleaner production; environmental impact of energy utilization; and environmentally sustainable production and consumption patterns.

10.13 Current trends in population growth and industrialization cause increased accumulation of wastes and pollutants and the unsustainable use of natural resources. If sustainable development is to be achieved, production processes, products and services have to be oriented towards new patterns, in order both to alleviate environmental stress and to achieve more efficient industrial productivity. This will require the development and use of new policy and management tools in both Government and industry, as well as the development and use of environmentally sound technologies, with a focus on cleaner and safer technologies that prevent pollution and use raw materials efficiently.

10.14 In the area of production, the objectives are to assess global and regional trends in industry production patterns and identify policies and strategies for cleaner production; provide better access to information on cleaner production technologies for developing countries and countries in transition; build international consensus on issues of sustainable production patterns and responses to them; support and catalyse national, subregional and regional clean production centres; assist in developing national and local capabilities to prepare for and respond to technological accidents; and provide effective servicing to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal.

10.15 Energy is a major component of economic development. Its production and consumption, however, have major short- and long-term impacts on the environment. Government and industry should therefore intensify efforts to formulate sustainable energy policies and develop technologies for production and use of energy in an economically efficient and environmentally sound manner.

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The objectives in this area are to expand dissemination of information on energy-efficient technologies and the impact of energy use on the environment; promote consensus-building among suppliers and consumers of energy at the global and regional level on environmentally sound energy policies; assist with preparation of projects on mitigating or eliminating adverse impacts of climate change for GEF financing; and provide effective institutional support to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

10.16 The major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, in particular in industrialized countries, which aggravates poverty and inequities. Measures to be undertaken at the international level for the protection and enhancement of the environment must take fully into account the current imbalances in the global patterns of consumption and production. Special attention should be paid to the demand for natural resources generated by unsustainable consumption and to the efficient use of those resources consistent with the goal of minimizing depletion and reducing pollution. The objectives in this area are to: contribute to the understanding of the relationship between production and consumption; promote dialogue among developed countries on environmentally sustainable production and consumption patterns; and promote information exchange on sustainable production and consumption systems.

Subprogramme 10.3 A better environment for human health and well-being

10.17 The objectives of the subprogramme, which is coordinated by the Executive Coordinator, Human Health and Well-Being, in the Programme Division, will focus on the following areas: reduced impact of toxic chemicals and waste; improved environmental management practices in urban areas; and mitigating the effects of environmental change and environmental emergencies.

10.18 Increasing amounts of toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes threaten the environment and human health, while many countries lack the necessary information, resources and expertise to ensure environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste. The objectives are to facilitate access to data on chemicals needed to assess, reduce and manage health and environmental risks; monitor and assess global trends and impacts of hazardous wastes; formulate guidelines on environmentally appropriate options for hazardous waste management; promote the preparation and implementation of an international legally binding instrument on prior informed consent for hazardous chemicals in international trade; and foster the development of a global instrument on persistent organic pollutants.

10.19 A growing proportion of the world's population lives in urban areas where social and environmental conditions are deteriorating rapidly. Continued deterioration of urban environments will not only impair the health and welfare of the populations but also reduce the capacity of large urban centres to sustain their role as engines for economic growth. The objectives in this area are to assess the effects of environmental pollution in urban areas and their impact on human health and well-being; promote innovative strategies for improving urban environmental planning and management through the Sustainable Cities Programme and the implementation of local versions of Agenda 21; and

facilitate the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to address the management of sewage, solid waste and freshwater resources for urban areas.

10.20 Most human populations are at risk from environmental change. This ranges from global change, such as depletion of the ozone layer, to exposure to harmful agents in the domestic environment. In addition, environmental accidents and emergencies occur with increasing frequency, placing natural and human habitats under acute stress. There is also an urgent need to assess the extent and severity of newly emerging threats and to investigate ways of anticipating environmental emergencies, as well as to derive more creative non-judicial mechanisms required for the avoidance of environmental disputes, especially in the area of shared use of natural resources. The objectives in this area are to develop response strategies for environmental threats and emergencies, and to mitigate the effects of environmental change and emergencies.

Subprogramme 10.4 Handling globalization and the environment

10.21 The subprogramme, which is coordinated by the Executive Coordinator, Globalization, in the Programme Division, will focus on the following areas: trade and environment, environmental economics and environmental law.

10.22 The globalization of trade, monetary and fiscal policies, capital markets and investment patterns is reshaping economic structures, factors of production, economies of scale and other considerations. Simultaneously, national and international responses to accelerating environmental degradation continue to strengthen. International consensus exists on the need to ensure that structural changes under way in the international economic order integrate ecological realities and environmental policy priorities. Considerable empirical, economic, legal and environmental assessment challenges remain, however, in delineating the ecological implications of economic globalization. The objectives in this area are to strengthen environmental assessment of international economic policies; improve environmental macro- and micro-economic analysis of the effectiveness and benefit/costs of environmental policies; and clarify relationships between international, regional and national environmental legislation, and international and regional trade agreements.

10.23 The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development recommended the integration of ecological factors into economic priorities as a prerequisite to sustainable development. Since the Conference, progress has been made to define links between the symptoms of environmental degradation and underlying pricing failures and other economic causes. However, the gap between conceptual analysis and practical application of environmental economics remains wide. Considerable methodological and technical challenges remain: defining the degree of environmental problems; choosing appropriate economic tools; identifying specific needs of individual countries; internalizing environmental externalities; adjusting market prices to reflect environmental factors; increasing the effectiveness of environmental impact assessment; linking environmental valuation with economic instruments; building technical and information capacity, in particular in developing and transitional economy countries; and using environmental economic tools effectively in environmental and economic planning. The objectives in this area are to develop further and

facilitate application of environmental economic tools, including valuation, natural resource accounting and environmental impact assessments, and to mobilize resources to support environmentally sound development.

10.24 Environmental change affects the global commons and, owing to globalization, impacts of environmental deterioration occur far from the original sources of change. To respond to the deterioration of the global and regional commons and to regulate environmental change worldwide, international and national laws have evolved as an essential tool for the management of the environment at national and international levels. The expanded environmental agenda has increased the need for further enhanced and more efficient legal and institutional regimes to meet the requirements of integrating environment and development. The objectives in this area are to provide a legal framework for facilitating the implementation of Agenda 21, in particular the further development of international environmental law aiming at sustainable development; and further strengthen UNEP technical legal and institutional assistance for development and implementation of environmental law, including national environmental legislation.

Subprogramme 10.5 Global and regional servicing and support

10.25 The subprogramme, which is under the responsibility of the Division of Policy and External Relations, the Division of Environmental Information and Assessment and the regional offices, will focus on global environment assessment; information for decision-making and action planning; environmental information services; public awareness, education and outreach to major groups; and support to regional and subregional cooperation.

10.26 UNEP addresses the need to keep under review the state of the world's environment and provide early warning of environmental threats. This is done through the preparation of and support to the production of global and regional state of the environment assessments, which include consideration of socio-economic driving forces and interactions. The objective is to improve access to information for decision-making and enhance developing countries' capabilities to use the information.

10.27 Scientific research is necessary to understand the functioning of natural systems, which ultimately determine the carrying capacity of the Earth and the ecological basis of sustainable development. A coordinated international scientific effort is necessary to address the critical linkages in the biosphere. This effort should involve local expertise and be conducted, whenever possible, by multidisciplinary teams from regional networks and/or research. The objective therefore is to promote targeted scientific and policy-relevant research in critical environmental areas, with special emphasis on climate, biodiversity, water and land degradation.

10.28 The gap in the availability, quality, coherence, standardization and accessibility to environmental data between the developed and the developing countries has been increasing, seriously impairing the capacities of the developing countries to make informed decisions concerning the sustainable utilization of natural resources. There is, in addition, a general lack of capacity, in particular in developing countries and countries with economies in

transition, for the efficient cross-sectoral handling of data, for their transformation into useful information on cumulative environmental impacts and for their dissemination to national and regional users. The objective is therefore to strengthen the existing national and international mechanisms of information processing and exchange, and of related technical assistance, in order to ensure effective and equitable availability of information generated at the local, provincial, national and international levels, subject to national sovereignty and relevant intellectual property rights.

10.29 There is a need to ensure that the world community has unfettered and coordinated access to UNEP information resources, as well as to environmental information in general. In that context, it is necessary for UNEP to facilitate access to unique sources of data and information, and to encourage the filling of information gaps. In addition, there needs to be improved coordination among environmental, demographic, social and developmental data and information activities, and the mechanisms of information management and delivery need to be harmonized. The objective is to design and implement a coordinated system for international environment information exchange.

10.30 There is also a need for fully developed and coherent policies in the field of environment as well as for adequate coordination of policy research and implementation. The objectives in this area are to develop policy recommendations and responses to emerging environmental issues and major events; promote collaboration between international and regional conventions in the field of environment; elaborate and promote the implementation of policies on gender and environment; promote and enhance environmental collaboration with and between international financial institutions; and lead system-wide coordination in the field of environment at the policy level.

10.31 Education and awareness are critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people to address environmental issues. They are necessary to achieve environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with sustainable development and for effective public participation by all groups in decision-making. The solution of environmental problems rests ultimately in the change or conscious adaptation of individual behaviour. The objectives in this area are to increase understanding of environmental issues and to utilize emerging information technologies in order to promote the participation of individuals and local communities in environmental decision-making; foster partnerships and strategic alliances with major groups, including the scientific community, non-governmental organizations and the private sector; and encourage good environmental citizenship on an individual level.

10.32 In response to geographically differentiated environmental concerns and interests, groups of countries are establishing or have already established cooperative regional and subregional frameworks. These frameworks provide effective mechanisms for the implementation of global environmental agreements and for addressing specific problems common to the participating States. The objective is to promote and support regional and subregional cooperative frameworks, including through advisory services to Governments, at their request.
